

[00:00:01.140] - Lisa C. Qualls

Welcome to the Adoption Connection podcast, where we offer resources to equip you and stories to inspire you on your adoption journey. I'm Lisa Qualls.

[00:00:09.980] - Melissa Corkum

And this is Melissa Corkum. Don't worry, we get it, and we're here for you.

[00:00:18.430] - Lisa C. Qualls

Welcome to this month's Mailbag episode where we answer your questions. Our first question comes from Gina.

[00:00:26.290] - Gina

I've been listening to the book *Connected Parent*, and I have an adult child. I'm wondering, what are some practical ways to say yes to an adult, to strengthen our connection?

[00:00:41.680] - Lisa C. Qualls

Well, first of all, Gina, thank you for reading the *Connected Parent*. I'm always so happy to hear that people are reading and benefiting from it. Dr. Purvis was a wonderful gift to our community, and I'm really thankful I got to be part of this. But *The Connected Parent*, we do talk about parenting teens, but you're talking about an adult, and I'm assuming young adult. And Melissa and I are both parenting teens and young adults. My kids range in age from 36 down to 16. Melissa, what's the age range of your kids?

[00:01:17.170] - Melissa Corkum

We have 25 to 16.

[00:01:20.180] - Lisa C. Qualls

So we are thick in parenting teens and young adults, so we are constantly talking about this personally in our conversations together and with many, many of the parents that we work with.

[00:01:32.550] - Melissa Corkum

There's not a ton of context. I'm going to assume that she's talking about an adult child who maybe doesn't live. I guess we can talk about both things because we've experienced both. But in a lot of ways, it's similar to older kids. We want to find ways that we can meet their bids for connection, meet their needs. It does get a little tricky because the adult needs of our kids sometimes are so much bigger. Maybe their ask is like, Will you pay my rent this month? Or something big like that. And so I think we also, like we talk so much about, have to be conscious of high structure, high nurture. And so in our house, I'm not going to bail you out of the craziness that you might get yourself into as an adult. So that's the high structure. The high nurture, though, is I will problem solve with you for how that could happen. So a yes might be, I can't pay your rent this month, but I would love to explore some options with you on how we can make that possible or something like that.

[00:02:45.840] - Melissa Corkum

I think we can also make sure, especially if it's a child not living with us, to make sure that we have our own bids of connection into that relationship. It's so easy for us to, especially if we still have kids at home that have high needs. So out of sight, out of mind, you're on your own, you're doing well, and not be as intentional about connecting. And I say this as a reminder to myself because I don't connect with my kids who live out of our home in the same way that I connect with the ones here. And I should probably be texting at least a weekly check in. Hey, was thinking about you. Hey, how are you doing? Hey, what's up? To our kids who don't live here.

[00:03:32.050] - Lisa C. Qualls

I'm right there with you, Melissa. I have so many adult and young adult kids that aren't here. They're not right in front of me demanding my attention. And so it's easy, I think, sometimes to think, Oh, they're fine. But they actually still do need our support and our care. And I wanted to touch on, too, that *The Connected Parent*, and a lot of the work we do is focused on building attachment. And attachment is a beautiful and wonderful thing. But when we're talking about kids who came to us

much older or kids who are teens and adults, if we did not have the opportunity to build secure attachment when they were young, we may feel like somehow we're supposed to keep trying. But I think at that point, what we really want to do is build trust and we want to build connection because they don't need us to meet their needs in the same way that a child does. And so it's going to look a little different from the efforts of building attachment. And I try to think of it like, even if I was not able to build secure attachment with one of my children, and now they're a teen or a young adult, what I have done, I hope, and what I continue to do, is give them a foundation that they, hopefully in the future, will be able to use to build secure attachment with their children in the future.

[00:04:58.280] - Lisa C. Qualls

So we're laying a foundation, but we're not trying to meet the needs in the same way that we would for a child because that would just hinder our teens and young adults, especially young adults who really are in a place where we need to be helping them be independent if they're not already. So we want to establish a relationship with them that supports them in their independence, doesn't make them need us too much, but also doesn't make them feel like they can't come to us because they do need to come to us still. So staying in communication, the way my family does that is it is the only thing I use Snapchat for. We have a family Snapchat group, I guess you would call it. I don't know. I don't use Snapchat for anything else except for my kids. But that is a fun way and an easy way that we stay connected as a family. And my teens and adults post stuff in there throughout the days and the weeks, and we respond as we can. And it's a really nice way because my family is also very spread out geographically with one daughter living in South America and kids in different places.

[00:06:07.440] - Lisa C. Qualls

So that family Snap has been a really nice way to stay in communication. We also, during COVID, one of my older daughters started a weekly family Zoom call. And as much as I am tired of Zoom, I love seeing my kids. And we set the bar really low. We do it right at dinner time. So dinner time on the West Coast. So some of us are eating dinner. Some people are washing their dishes. It doesn't matter. It's just a point of connecting during the week. So those are some really small things for just maintaining connection. And then there are a lot of things that we can do to build that relationship.

[00:06:42.250] - Melissa Corkum

So our situation is that our two kids who are living not in our home are not super needy to us. They're not calling and texting all the time. Because that's our dynamic, when they do call, I really try to pick up whenever that is, even if it's just to say, Hey, I can't talk right now. When's a good time to connect? So that they're getting that little bit of feedback. The other thing is we in terms of financial support, our kids pay for a lot of things early on, even before they're adults. So as an example, our kids pay for college and they pay for cars and insurance and driver's ed and all of those things. And so the expectation is that they are paying for the things that they want to do that make them closer and closer towards independence and adulthood. That's the expectation. But sometimes it's fun. And my parents did this for us to just surprise them with a, Hey, we'll cover that this time, or, We'll pick that up. And again, our dynamic is that we have kids that won't create more problems down the road of changing expectations, at least for our kids who are adults. I have one kid who I think that might be an issue for down the road. But for now, that's the way we're able to say yes sometimes without creating that over dependence.

[00:08:23.920] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah. And I think just with young children, we do want to look at our teens and young adults behavior and ask, what is the need behind that behavior? That's a useful skill for our entire lives and our adult relationships, too. Why is my partner acting this way? Why is my daughter, who's married and has her own children, acting in this way? We are all trying to find ways to have our needs met in life. And so that should continue with your adult kids when some behavior is being exhibited, Okay, what's really going on? Now, if your child has insight, you can actually ask them, Wow, you seem really mad about this thing that happened. Can you tell me what you're feeling? Can you tell me what's going on there? I mean, if you're able to have those conversations, I think that's great. Not all of our kids have that capacity to have insight. So I think us just being aware is important. And sometimes we can even point it out to them, like, Wow, you seem really mad that I did this thing for your sister. I'm wondering if you're feeling like maybe I'm taking better care of her than I am of you, or whatever it is.

[00:09:40.290] - Lisa C. Qualls

We can give them some words, some language sometimes. Another thing, and Melissa is particularly good at this, is creating a foundation of fun. And when our kids don't live at home, it's different, but still having fun as part of our relationships is really important.

[00:09:58.460] - Melissa Corkum

Currently, she's not technically an adult yet and she still lives with us. But an example, and I don't know that I'm great with this with all of my kids, but I can say I'm rocking this one, is Mia and I have been going to social dances like Lindy Hop dances. And then we also have been taking Lindy Hop classes. They actually just ended last night. We will probably continue next time our schedules align. But in the meantime, we'll continue going out social dancing together. And so that's been really fun. It's been really fun, we've been getting to know some of the regulars that come. People are just starting to figure out how we're related. And so that's been funny, too. We've gotten lots of... Because I think she presents as older than she is, and some people don't know if we're friends or what the deal is. And so we stopped someone in their tracks the other day. We were at practice and she called me over to ask me a question and she called me mom. And the conversation took the next couple of steps. The guy went to respond to us and then he went, Wait, did you just call her mom? Is that how you're related? So it's been fun. But I think just thinking outside the box, Patrick has been playing cornhole, which I know I've talked about many times here on the podcast, but we've been able to include a lot of our kids in that. Our youngest, in particular, has really taken that up with him. They go to tournaments together throughout the week. I think inviting our kids into something, even if we don't think they'd be interested, giving always, I call it the open handed invitation where we're really genuinely interested if they come, but we're also not emotionally attached if they say, no, thank you. It is a fun thing to think about outside the box ways to have fun.

[00:11:51.280] - Lisa C. Qualls

This is an extreme way, but a couple of years ago, we had an opportunity to fall into our laps to buy a little shack of a cabin on a lake in North Idaho. And we did that, not because Russ and I really needed another thing to take care of, but we did it to create opportunity for fun and relaxation as a family. So far, it's been a whole lot of work for me because the place needs a lot of work. But we're hopefully setting a foundation of this is a place where you can come and gather with us and spend time with us that's fun, that's relaxing. There's water, there's hiking. Nobody has a boat yet, but my son in law is pretty determined to buy a boat, which will add another whole element to being on the lake together. And clearly this is not an opportunity for everybody, but all of us can maybe go to a park, and we do a family Sunday dinner most Sundays. However, my kids have all moved away except for a couple. So it's gotten a lot smaller. But even a Sunday picnic in a park where you're just having fun together, I think we need to create opportunities to build memories of fun with our adult and young adult kids.

[00:13:05.850] - Lisa C. Qualls

The other thing I would say is that sometimes our kids need us. And one of my daughters once got really sick and we actually flew her home to take care of her. And this is a daughter who really struggles not wanting to have her needs met, but sometimes needs are big enough that our kids are willing to receive our help. And so caring for them when they're sick, caring for them when something goes wrong. I have two daughters with babies now, and so caring for them when they had their babies. These are all things. We're answering this question in a really super, super broad way. It could be that caring for your child means picking them up from whatever program they're in because they're really struggling in life and taking them to dinner. There's a whole range of experience here. But basically just making sure they know that they are loved and that we're willing to do what we can to support them as they are maturing and developing in their lives without enabling them, bailing them out in ways that are unhealthy, which a lot of us have to be very mindful of. And I'm not as good at it as Melissa is because she is naturally high structure. I am naturally high in nurture, and I can definitely veer toward the ditch of too much nurture if I'm not careful. So even just today, we had a conversation about this, and Melissa was like, Well, Lisa, that's simple. Do this. So it does help to have someone to process with, I will say that.

[00:14:48.730] - Melissa Corkum

Our next question is from Steve. My wife, age 40, and I, age 53, have completed a home study and are in child search. We have no kids of our own. I originally wanted a teen before they aged out and became homeless. We were persuaded to go younger for what seemed like valid reasons. So we decided to look for a sibling set ages 3 through 8. I still feel led to adopt older. My wife will go along as long as the situation feels right. What are your thoughts on first adoption and our first kids being teens versus younger?

[00:15:21.580] - Lisa C. Qualls

That is a great question. This is a little different from any question we've gotten, so that's neat. I guess I would spend some time with your wife really exploring what led you to want to adopt teens. I think it's beautiful and I think it's a gift to be called to adopt teens. And I'm really curious what the valid reasons are that people are encouraging you to go younger. I think often people will say, Well, you should go younger because you've never parented and you need to learn how to parent with younger kids. And there may be a false belief that it will be easier. And it's not necessarily going to be easier. Children between the ages of three and eight who've experienced significant adversity are not going to be easy. And so, yes, you might have more time to prepare for what are supposed to be the hard years of being teens. But on the other hand, it's not going to necessarily be easier. And so I wish we knew a little bit more about why you've been advised that way. Maybe there are some things that we don't know, but I think adopting teens is great.

[00:16:39.010] - Lisa C. Qualls

And some of us really love teenagers and enjoy them. If you're not one of those people, if you're really just thinking we should adopt the kids who are the hardest to place, that probably, to me, is not the best reason. But if you really enjoy teenagers and you're willing to dive in deep to some of the hard stuff like vaping and failing school and maybe rejecting your faith, I'm talking about the hard stuff. If you're ready to dive into the deep end of some of the behaviors that seem more extreme, maybe harder, I think that's great. And you could just focus on that period of development because it's an incredible time with the brain. There's a book, *Brainstorm*, about the teenage brain by Dan Siegel. You could just really focus in on that. Maybe this is not what you wanted to hear, but I would really explore that. If you're a person of faith, I would pray about it a lot and see where God leads you to go because I do know parents who have adopted only teens, and it's been really good. It's good if you're going to adopt teens, it's good to do it when you don't have a bunch of littles, who could be potentially at risk of being harmed or just observing a lot of really scary, stressful things. So you're in a great position for it if you really feel called to it.

[00:18:13.240] - Melissa Corkum

I think the question is less about age. The question is about age, and I think it's probably not the age of the child that will make your adoption situation feel successful or not successful. I think in our experience as we've worked with families, because every situation is so different, what are the bigger indicators are? One, being really clear on the why of why you're adopting and what is your definition of success in coming into adoption? Is that even possible? If your definition of success is to feel like parents, that might not be possible regardless of the age of the child you bring home. If you're wanting to just walk alongside and be the best resource you possibly can be to a child, you can do that regardless of the age. I think the other things that show up again and again as we work with parents are teachability and flexibility. How open are you to flexing what your parenting style may have to be, whether it's younger kids or older kids? How are you able to research and take on other people's suggestions? And really just our own personal insight on why we do what we do and are we willing to do whatever work is on our side of the fence to do.

[00:19:54.050] - Melissa Corkum

And I think if you're taking all of those things seriously in terms of your own personal development and how you're coming into this and grieving well, the life that you're losing, I don't know how long you've been married, but 40 and 53 are a long time to go through life not having to be responsible for a child. And parenthood changes us and it rocks our world. I think regardless of the age, like those are the age of the child, those are the other things that I think will contribute to whether or not ultimately, whether it's a sibling group of ages 3 through 8 or a single teenager, how this feels to you all. The things I wish we would have known coming into adoption are personal insights like the Enneagram

has given us, things like blocked care, what was even possible in all of this? And so I would say even read resources that feel like, I don't know if this applies to me right now. We're plugging our book right now at every opportunity we can get. And I think even if you don't do all the exercises, you just read through to see what's possible, then that's half the battle to know, Oh, I could recognize myself sliding into blocked care so much earlier. If I had recognized that earlier on, I could have done something about it before it was catastrophic to my own nervous system. So yeah, I think those are the things, regardless of age, I would say, focus more on teachability, flexibility, personal insight, and all of those things.

[00:21:34.540] - Lisa C. Qualls

I think that's great. And yeah, in the book, really, we're giving a pathway toward healing and reclaiming compassion for your child and yourself, but we're really talking about good nervous system care for all parents. So no matter what age of child you adopt, I think there are so many useful things in *Reclaim Compassion*. I would add one more thing about adopting teens and older kids, and that is I would have really honest conversations with the child you may consider adopting about whether they want to be adopted. And do they want parents? Or do they feel like if they're in the foster system, do they feel like, I've had parents, and really what I just need is some adults to help me finish growing up. And who knows what will develop and come. But I think when we go into adopting older kids and teens with the idea that we are going to become their one and only mom and dad, I think we are setting ourselves and them up for things not going that well because we need to be really aware of what they need and what they want and have good, honest expectations of what that's going to look like.

[00:22:50.940] - Lisa C. Qualls

But I'm excited for you, honestly. And whether you adopt little ones or whether you adopt teens, adopting as older parents, there are some really beautiful things because we do have a perspective on life that can help us realize what's important and what is really not important. Because you know what? There are a lot of things young parents worry about that me now in my 50s, I'm like, yeah, that doesn't matter so much. So I think you have wisdom on your side.

[00:23:19.760] - Lisa C. Qualls

This question comes from a member of our free Facebook group. She writes, I'm just beginning to delve into research about attachment issues that we have with my daughter. She's six and has been with us since she was two. She does a weird, whiny thing at bedtime about hugs. She begs for more hugs on our way out the door. But in real life, during the day, if I hug her, she just stands there like a limp noodle. This feels confusing and like a trick or a game. And then I get triggered and dysregulated. If I could just know why she's doing this, I think it would help me to understand and hopefully not get so annoyed or feel so manipulated and triggered by it. I'm also just so warn and learn out from screwing this up every single day.

[00:24:03.140] - Melissa Corkum

Well, I have so much compassion. I feel like I want to give this mom a hug. And I think the first thing I would say is you're not screwing it up every single day. I talk about this a lot, but our definition of success sometimes is miscued or misplaced. If our definition of success is that we're either, one, going to know how to meet our kids needs every single turn, or that we're going to act in a way where our kids are giving us feedback that we're doing it all right, then we will probably always feel like failures. Just because your child is asking for one thing but really wants another or is rejecting your affection does not mean you're doing anything wrong. It doesn't mean anyone's doing anything wrong. It's just the tricky nature of navigating attachment and our nervous systems and all of those things. In terms of the why, again, don't have all the information, but some of the questions that I would wonder about are the difference between your daughter asking for a hug and receiving it, versus getting a hug or trying to receive it at a time that she's not expecting it or she hasn't asked for it.

[00:25:27.050] - Melissa Corkum

It might be just the way the question was written, and that might not be what's going on. But at night, if she's asking for a hug and you get it, she from a sensory perspective, from an attachment

perspective, she's ready for it. And then a lot of our kids, because of their histories, don't do well with change or things or affections that they're not in control of. And so if you're offering a hug or coming up and hugging her and her system doesn't have time to process it in time, then that might result in an action of feeling like she's not accepting it. And it might not be that she's manipulating you or not accepting it. She just might not be able to process or be ready for affection that quickly.

[00:26:15.900] - Lisa C. Qualls

Right. And another thing is it may not be as much about the hug as it is about fear of separation at bedtime, fear of nighttime. It may feel like she's manipulating you, but it may also be that she actually knows you're the person who keeps her safe, and she's not feeling safe at bedtime. She's feeling in her nervous system, she's feeling anxious and worried about her own safety. And so she's seeking affection, like Melissa said, at a time when she is ready for it and wants it. And so it could be more about bedtime. And I know she's little, but you might want to just talk to her about bedtime. How do you feel at bedtime? How does it feel when mommy leaves the room? Or what makes you feel safe at bedtime? I don't know how much she can express, but I would see if there are ways you can actually help her feel safer at bedtime. And maybe that would solve the weird hug situation. Maybe not. But it's something to explore. And that's why we're always talking about looking for the meaning behind the behavior because it could mean something different, and it could be related to something different. And then if we say, Well, actually, this is maybe more about separation at nighttime and her not feeling safe at night and in bed. Well, then we can address it and look for solutions in a different direction. It could be all about the hugs. It could be about bedtime. But I think just being so curious, and I know you are curious, which is why you're asking the question, but really looking for the subtle cues and maybe seeing if you can explore it with her a little bit might give you some ideas of what might help.

[00:28:01.040] - Melissa Corkum

I also wonder if she's begging for more hugs at bedtime and then also not receiving them, which can be equally as frustrating when our kids are like, I just need one more hug, one more hug, one more hug, and then you go to give them a hug and they're shrugging you off. And so I think, again, especially at 6, that's probably just her not having the right words for what she really needs. She's using her... She knows that you'll come back to give a hug because she knows hugs are important to you. But she might not really want a hug so much as she wants to reconnect with you in some way or wants you not to leave, like Lisa was saying, the separation anxiety. Again, we answer in broad strokes during mail bag episodes because we don't get to interact with folks and we don't have all the information. But those can open up some of the possibilities of there are many, many reasons besides just manipulation to help you regain your compassion for her in the hug situation.

[00:29:04.510] - Melissa Corkum

And then I don't want to skip this part at the end. I'm so worn out, I'm screwing this up every single day. And or that the mom is getting triggered or dysregulated. In our book about blocked care, we talk so much about nervous system care and how important that is because we want to be strong enough in our own nervous system as parents so that when these tricky things happen with our kids, that they don't rock our boat so much. We want to be able to be that stable foundation. And there might be some work to do on our side of the fence when these types of things happen. Another curiosity question would be, why is it so triggering to me when I go to hug my daughter and she's a limp noodle? Do I have other things in my past where someone has rejected my bid for connection and I have wounds there that I haven't fully recognized or realized or addressed? Do I have the capacity to add humor to that situation when you go to give a hug and she acts like a limp noodle, can you turn that into a playful engagement thing? Or are you so hurt that you can't diffuse that situation?

[00:30:22.200] - Lisa C. Qualls

And even practically speaking, I know when my kids were little, oh, my word, the days felt so long and I was so tired. And it may be that you've been looking forward all day to her being in her bed, tucked in, hopefully asleep so that you can finally relax. So maybe there are practical things you could tell yourself. Okay, I'm going to start putting her to bed 15 minutes earlier so that I can give her more time, more attention, and still have time to sit down and watch a show with my husband, or do something that I really enjoy doing. Just put her to bed earlier and then give yourself back the time that you feel

like, Okay, I'm just guessing here based on my own experience, but you feel like maybe this time is just being sucked away by this child with a deep well of need that you're never going to be able to fill. I mean, I have been there. And so think about, what can I do for myself to make this better, to help me roll with it a little bit better, and maybe just putting her bed to bed earlier so that you still get that time would be helpful.

[00:31:30.700] - Lisa C. Qualls

So really think about what you need in this, not just what she needs, but what you need in order to not make this tip you over into your own dysregulation because you've already done everything you can do for the day. Also, if you have a partner parenting with you, you might just want to pass off bedtime or trade off or just figure out ways to make it a little less stressful for you.

[00:31:56.580] - Melissa Corkum

I also had another thought that nods to the attachment cycle. I think sometimes it's a tendency when we say extra earlier bedtime, give extra hugs, because that's what it sounds like she needs or extra attention, that we stay longer, that we draw out the bedtime routine. But maybe it's that you make the routine just a little bit shorter and so that you leave so that you're initiating where she says, Oh, don't leave yet. Come back. And you can say, Oh, yeah, I'd love to come back for one more hug versus just saying, Hey, she keeps asking for more and more, so I'm just going to stay longer initially. There might be something to the asking and saying yes, the asking and saying yes. So you might want to start leaving sooner so that you can initiate that and that you feel like you have the time to say five joyful yeses to, Will you come back and give me one last hug? But you're really spending the same amount of time overall.

[00:32:53.970] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah, that's a good point. Maybe even try to approach it playfully like, Okay, how many hugs do you need from mommy tonight? And do it in a playful way. Count them each time. Maybe don't try to leave. Maybe try to give five hugs, like a hug and then something, and hug and then something and like, Okay, this is hug number three, whatever it is. You can really try to approach it in a playful way. But I do think there's something important about not expending yourself to the point that you just feel like you're going to lose your mind giving one more hug because we totally get that. We really do. And we want you to take care of you, too.

[00:33:30.560] - Melissa Corkum

Well, if you have a question for a future Mailbag episode, our favorite way to answer questions is when we get to hear them in your own voice. So you can pop over to the show notes for this episode and record on our handy dandy little recording widget. You could also record your question on a voice note on your phone and shoot that over to us in a message at email@theadoptionconnection.com. Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. Our new Instagram handle is [@postadoptionresources](https://www.instagram.com/postadoptionresources). Or better yet, join our free Facebook community at the [adoptionconnection.com/Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/adoptionconnection.com/Facebook).

[00:34:10.640] - Lisa C. Qualls

Thanks so much for listening. We love having you. Remember, you're a good parent doing good work.

[00:34:18.900] - Melissa Corkum

The music for the podcast is called New Day and was created by Lee Roosevere.